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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BASRAH 000028

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SUBJECT: PM MALIKI'S TRIBAL INITIATIVE IN BASRAH

REF: A. A) BASRAH 25

[B](#). B) 07 BASRAH 120

[C](#). C) 07 BASRAH 112

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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (c), (d)

[1](#). (S/REL MCFI) SUMMARY: Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has reversed his previous opposition to a tribal initiative in Iraq's Shia south. Shunning Coalition involvement, Maliki affirmed the nascent scheme will be GOI-led and appears to be under the direction of Acting Minister of Justice Safa al-Safi. Locally, tribal and political committees have been formed with a coordinating committee representing both reporting directly to Safi. So far, only one tribal battalion has been organized under the lead of Sheikh Muzahim al-Tamimi, while recruits for other battalions are being vetted. The GOI has provided little logistical support leaving that matter to the tribes, and Muzahim has already asked for Coalition help. Potential problems include: political interference, the lack of logistical and strategic planning, and ensuring the tribal battalions' mission dovetails with that of the Coalition. USG involvement may be required to shape, and potentially salvage, this initiative. End Summary.

[2](#). (S/REL MCFI) PM Maliki, when his late March "Charge of the Knights" operation to tackle Basrah's militias appeared to be failing, called upon tribal leaders to form armed auxiliaries to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Previously, Maliki had opposed a tribal engagement strategy modeled on the USG-organized Concerned Local Citizen (CLC) - now called Sons of Iraq (SOI) - initiative, asserting that the tribes would constitute new militias unaccountable to the GOI. Maliki's reversal was the consequence of a desperate need to identify additional help during the critical stages of the Battle for Basrah when ISF members had refused to fight or had outright deserted.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

[3](#). (S/REL MCFI) By April 4, Maliki made it clear that this

tribal initiative would be GOI-led. However, the precipitous manner of its implementation led to the GOI reaching out to local sheikhs and politicians before determining which ministry would have oversight. It now appears that logistical/financial responsibilities fall to the MOI, but the local committees overseeing efforts are accountable to Maliki through Justice Minister Safa al-Safi. We also hear that MOI Director of Tribal Affairs MG Marid al-Ardi may be involved and on April 7, the GOI sent a delegation from the Implementation Follow up National Committee for Reconciliation (IFNCR), the PM's Office (PMO), and the Office of the Commander in Chief (OCINC) to help local leaders organize. The IFNCR team consisted of Shaykh Husayn al-Faiz, Dr. 'Abbud Wahid al-'Isawi, Ahmad Hassun Hamadi and Staff Colonel Muhammad Sawballah.

¶4. (S/REL MCFI) In terms of tribal leadership, Maliki asked Sheikh Muzahim al-Tamimi to take charge. Muzahim's tribe, the Bani Tamim, is among Basrah's largest and most influential tribes; Muzahim, despite his former Ba'ath Party membership, is highly respected -- a nationalist with military experience and strong command presence. (Note: Muzahim is among a group of Shia sheikhs whom REO nominated for a White House visit. End Note.) He has already asserted control, with his cousin, Mansur al-Kana'an, acting as his right hand (See Ref A). Muzahim told us that currently only a limited number of sheikhs are participating because the program is in a formative stage and Mansur and Muzahim want to closely consider which tribes to involve.

THE POLITICAL COMMITTEES

¶5. (S/REL MCFI) Organization at a local level is also ad hoc and GOI-driven. According to Muzahim, Maliki originally established just a Tribal Committee, but the political parties complained and Maliki allowed them to "save face" by creating a Political Committee as well. Safi also wanted the two groups separated to prevent the political parties from influencing the Tribal Committee to accept politically affiliated recruits for the

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tribal battalions.

¶6. (S/REL MCFI) The Political Committee's role is still unknown at this time. Muzahim believed that 14 members would be appointed, but the size of the committee and appointments have yet to be finalized. Though invited, the Sadrists are boycotting the political committee or if they have not yet agreed on a candidate. Known members are:

- Hasan al-Rashid (Badr)(Basrah Provincial Council member and former governor)
- Dagher al-Mousawi (Sayyid al Shuhada, COR member)
- Furat al-Shar'a (Head of ISCI in Basrah)
- Dr. Abd al-Jabar al Ghanduri (Head of Basrah National Independent Movement)
- Muhammad Sihr al-Ubadi (Central Dawa)(PC Chairman)
- Sayyid Baha Jamal al-Din (Basrah National Independent Movement - Central Dawa)(PC member)
- Khalaf Shammoud Bustan (Iraqi National Accord, also represents Communists and Iraqi National Gathering)(PC Member)
- Muntasir al-Imara (Iraqi Future)
- Abu Mujahid al-Maliki (Iraqi Hizbollah)
- Muhsan Hamed (Fadhila)(alternate: Dr. Dargham)

TRIBAL COMMITTEE

¶7. (C/REL MCFI) According to Muzahim, the Tribal Committee, is responsible for nominating and approving tribal recruits for the battalions, pressuring tribal members with JAM affiliations to lay down their arms, encouraging Iraqis in their spheres of influence to obey the law, and directing district-level problems to the GOI for resolution. It remains to be seen if other sheikhs are invited to participate. The following are members:

- Muzahim al-Tamimi (Bani Tamim)
- Mansur al-Kana'an al-Tamimi (Bani Tamim)
- Abd al-Amir al-'Atbi (al-'Atab)
- Abd al-Amir al-Aydani (al-Aydan)

- Amr al-Faiz (Bani Amr)
- Mohammed Ali al-Maturi (al-Mitur)
- Sabri al-Baydani (al-Baydan)
- Salam al-Maliki (Bani Malik)
- Ya'rib al-Imarah (al-Imarah)
- Hasan al-Kheyum (Bani Asad)
- Adnan al-Ghanim (al-Ghanim)
- Nazar al-Jabri (Sada al-Jawaaber)
- Najeh Shinawa (Rabiah)
- Sabah Hatem Ridah (Shaghanbeh)
- Jabar al-Ubadi (al-Ubadi)
- Dakhil Abd al-Zahra (Selmi)

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

¶8. (C/REL MCFI) The Coordinating Committee, comprised of three members each from both the Political and Tribal Committees, will report directly to Safa al-Safi and forward through him proposals to the PM's Office. It consists of:

- Muzahim al-Tamimi
- Mansur al-Kana'an al-Tamimi
- Amr al-Faiz
- Hasan al-Rashid
- Muntasir al-Imarah
- Dagher al-Mousawi

WHAT HAVE THEY ACCOMPLISHED?

¶9. (C/REL MCFI) Reporting indicates that by the second day of fighting on March 25, several tribes - namely the influential Bani Tamim and Bani Malik - decided to support Maliki's efforts to restore law and order. Muzahim told us that the tribes were able to effectively secure some neighborhoods, including the Tunnumah district east of the Shatt al-Arab waterway and Albu al-Khaseeb (SE of Basrah). Tribes also helped ISF units isolate areas, prevent militia movements, confiscate and deliver weapons caches to the Iraqi Army (IA), and even restore stations, vehicles, and weapons taken by Jaysh al-Mahdi to the Iraqi Police (IP). The Bani Tamim not only returned the Shatt al-Arab IP station (in Tunnumah) and provided a 60-man guard force, but also confiscated the OMS office and turned it into a tribal headquarters (Ref A). Mansur wryly noted, "The ISF did 10 percent and we did 90 percent of the work to secure these areas." He claimed they could also have cleared out areas they isolated, but were prevented by government officials because of GOI links to the militia leaders.

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¶10. (C/REL MCFI) Tribal battalions are also assisting the GOI's weapons turn-in program by manning collecting points, transporting arms to the ISF, and using their influence to pressure militias to hand weapons over. On the day of the deadline (April 8), Mansur told us that a pitiful seven AK variants and three PKCs had been turned in. The next day, the GOI delegation reportedly gathered around 70 tribal leaders at Basrah Palace who committed to gathering and turning in weapons in their areas.

¶11. (C/REL MCFI) Muzahim told us that Maliki has authorized 25,000 tribesmen to be recruited, while media sources are reporting a figure of 10,000. One tribal battalion has stood up in the Tunnumah and Shatt al-Arab districts. The Tribal Committee is currently recruiting and vetting names for additional battalions in the Zubayr, Gurnah, and Albu al Khaseeb districts. Muzahim said that recruits hailed from different tribes in each district to avoid organizing a militia for any one tribe. Those already recruited have been provided the blue uniforms of the Facilities Protection Service and wear a red armband. There have also been reports that 2,500 tribesmen have been allowed to enlist in the IA.

¶12. (C/REL MCFI) Muzahim is currently seeking GOI approval to return 55 former regime IA officers to serve as platoon, company and battalion commanders. They allegedly have no political or religious affiliations and would initially serve a trial period.

If they perform well, their postings would be made permanent. Since the GOI has yet to train any of these tribal units, Muzahim has already ordered these officers to teach basic training skills. Despite the intention of setting up a tribal battalion in the Sunni dominated area of Zubayr, the leading Sunni sheikh there, Muhammad al-Dosari, has told us that no Sunni tribes have been invited to participate so far.

GOI SUPPORT LACKING - TRIBES ORGANIZE THEMSELVES

¶13. (C/REL MCFI) Logistical support for this tribal initiative has been lacking, owing to the lack of planning. It may also be intentional as the GOI determines if this is to be a long-term project and/or to possibly limit the empowerment of the tribes as a counter to the political parties. While long-term funding remains a question, we understand that Justice Minister al-Safi has informed Muzahim that the tribes may apply for some of the \$100M USD that Maliki has promised for Basrah's re-development.

¶14. (C/REL MCFI) Thus far, the GOI has only provided some uniforms and ammunition and has yet to pay salaries. Tribesmen have been told to bring their own weapons and sheikhs have been gathering arms from within the tribes to arm fighters; some reports state that the MOI handed out some small/medium weapons. Muzahim strongly criticized the GOI's failure to supply them, but also called it 'shameful' that the MOD and MOI are failing to feed, re-equip and pay their own troops. Over the past week, the Bani Tamim fed not only their own men, but also the IA battalion in Tannumah.

REQUEST FOR SUPPORT

¶15. (S/REL MCFI) Tribal leaders have for some time expressed frustration that the UK ignored them and considered them irrelevant. In fairness, they are also frustrated with the lack of USG intervention over the last year. Still, they appreciate the rapport the REO has established, express optimism that the USG will provide support, and are eager to share information and cooperate with us.

¶16. (S/REL MCFI) Muzahim provided us a list of needs including light to heavy weapons, ammunition, armored vehicles, uniforms, housing trailers, computers, an ambulance, water and fuel trucks, generators, anti-riot equipment, fixed and portable road blocks, latrines, cooking equipment, and office equipment. That list has been given to MNC-I.

WHAT IS NEXT?

¶17. (S/REL MCFI) Some observers believe the tribes' influence in the city has degraded as people have urbanized; therefore, a tribal initiative will only be successful in Basrah City's outskirts and provincial rural neighborhoods. This may be true, but it has yet to be seen whether the tribes, if given the opportunity and a bit of muscle, could shape urban environments. Leaders of the tribal initiative may be trying to find out. As

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of April 8, we learned they have plans to divide Basrah City into seven sectors where they eventually intend to deploy their forces. This contravenes the conventional wisdom that tribal units would operate in their rural, traditional areas of influence. We also assess that tribal units could be used (Ref B), more effectively to conduct anti-smuggling operations east of the Shatt al-Arab Waterway from Faw to Amarah, patrol/secure the Iranian border and major supply lines, gather intelligence, provide static security for key infrastructure, and if necessary, surge into urban areas to assist ISF/CF.

COMMENT: POTENTIAL PROBLEMS AHEAD

¶18. (S/REL MCFI) Comment: The success of this initiative will be dependent on this early, formative stage. Unfortunately, there already are several negative warning signs. Maliki's decision not to involve the Coalition in lieu of a GOI-led scheme could be viewed as a positive indicator that the GOI wants more

ownership of Iraq's affairs. However, the program could obviously benefit from the USG's SOI experience in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, and other provinces. Another concern is the involvement of the political parties. Maliki may have created the Political Committee as more than a "face saving" measure. The parties greatly fear empowering the tribes at their expense and likely wanted a role to prevent the diminution of their power. Furthermore, the committee's composition heavily favors the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)-led parties, raising concerns among many Iraqis of potential Iranian influence. After Mansur's appointment to the Coordinating Committee, he told Safi and Interior Minister Jawad al-Boulani that they put him on a committee being run by Iranians. Numerous sources are concerned about Dagher al-Mousawi's significant role given reporting of his ties to Iran and nefarious activities.

¶19. (S/REL MCFI) The lack of planning, long-term vision, and adequate support are also potential problems. Questions remain as to how long the tribal battalions will be employed, whether they will be integrated into the ISF, how much funding they will receive and where it will come from, how quickly the GOI can organize logistic support for them and what type of training they will get. Consideration will have to be given to the disposition and use of the tribal battalions.

¶20. (S/REL MCFI) The Battle for Basrah is not over; despite the current calm, the underlying problems here will continue to require CF attention. The proper usage and integration of these tribal battalions will be essential to the success, rather than the hindrance of our operations. These issues may necessitate some level of Coalition involvement - even if it is only to provide advice and help shape the initiative into something more palatable. End Comment.

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